

Acute Hemorrhagic Conjunctivitis

Prepared by Bill Bigler, PhD
DOH, Bureau of Epidemiology

Acute hemorrhagic conjunctivitis (AHC) is a relatively rare disease caused by coxsackievirus A24 and enterovirus 70. It is not a notifiable disease in Florida. Onset is usually sudden with a severely painful conjunctivitis and subconjunctival hemorrhage that resolves in five to seven days.¹ While there are no long-term ophthalmic sequelae reported for this disease, about one in 10,000 persons infected with enterovirus 70 develops a polio-like paralysis (radiculomyelitis).

Numerous epidemics have been documented worldwide and the clinical and epidemiological features of AHC in the United States appear similar to those reported in other countries. An outbreak that spread across eight southern Florida counties in 1981 may have been a northward extension of an epidemic in South and Central America.² During September and October 1981, explosive outbreaks of AHC were documented in Key West, Monroe County (732 cases) Miami, Dade County (3,500 cases), and Ft. Lauderdale, Broward County (929 cases).^{3,4,5}

The outbreaks in Florida moved very rapidly. Initially, from September 4-14, 1981, 60 cases were reported in Key West, and by September 21 the Monroe County Health Department had received reports of 362 cases of illnesses compatible with AHC.^{3,5} Key West cases were generally confined to two neighboring housing projects. In a survey of 129 AHC cases in 78 families from Key West, ages ranged from 9 months to 75 years with 75% black, 19% white and 5% Hispanic. An isolation of enterovirus 70 was made from a 16-year-old Key West High School student within 12 hours after acute onset of bilateral conjunctivitis, subconjunctival hemorrhage, and profuse watery discharge. Cases of AHC were also being reported from Dade County beginning on September 8, 1981 at a rate of 15-65 per day.⁴ Demographic data collected from 1000 of the 3500 cases reported from Miami show ages ranged from 7 days to 85 years with 92% black, 4,8% white and 2.5% Hispanic. Most cases were from a poor, predominantly black community in northwest Miami.

Factors influencing the occurrence and spread of AHC in the United States, including seasonal conditions, are unknown. Exclusion from school or work may curtail geographic spread of the illness, but could increase attack rates within affected families. Proven preventive measures stress personal hygiene, including no sharing of towels and other toiletries, frequent hand washing, and elimination of crowded living conditions.

References

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